



## Children's Social Care - National Implementation Board

Minutes of meeting held on 30 April 2024, 10:30-12:00.

Department for Education: Sanctuary Buildings, and virtually via MS Teams.

### Attendees

- David Johnston MP, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing. Chair.
- Andy Smith – President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Anne-Marie Connelly – care leaver, working at Action for Children
- Sir Anthony Finkelstein CBE, FREng - President of City, University of London.  
Computer Scientist
- Isabelle Trowler CBE - Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for England
- Janet Kay OBE - adopter and kinship carer
- Jill Colbert OBE - Chief Executive of Together for Children and Director for Children's Services in Sunderland
- Juliette Cammaerts - Director: Policy, Planning and Delivery - Children's Commissioner's Office (deputising for Rachel De Souza)
- Lisa Pascoe - Ofsted Deputy Director for Social Care Policy (deputising for Yvette Stanley)
- Sir Martyn Oliver - His Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted
- Tom Riordan CBE - Chief Executive of Leeds City Council

### Item 1: Introductions

The Minister thanked everyone for their input and engagement since the last meeting, in January.

Andy Smith (President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services) and Sir Martyn Oliver (Ofsted Chief Inspector) introduced themselves, as new members to the Board. They both emphasised their strong support for the *Stable Homes, Built on Love* reform agenda. They look forward to working closely with the Department and the Board to help deliver positive change for children and families.

## Item 2: Delivery Update

The Board discussed the latest delivery information, which included progress updates, risks, issues, milestones, and successes.

Since the January meeting, there has been considerable progress including:

- The Department secured additional capital investment at the Spring Budget of £165 million, thanks to a robust evidence base that demonstrates return on investment and improved outcomes for children in care.
- This money will be used to refurbish and maintain capacity within children's homes, and to work with local authorities to develop settings for children with complex needs or those at risk of Deprivation of Liberty Orders.
- The National Kinship Strategy (published December 2023) has been well received and we are working at pace to implement a number of specific elements within it. There has been lots of interest, and applications, for the role of National Kinship Care Ambassador.
- The recently launched FosterLink programme, which helps local authorities review their fostering services and identify where improvements can be made, has already engaged over a hundred local areas.
- We are now moving into the second wave of the Families First for Children Pathfinder, adding seven more local authority partners as well as learning lessons from the first wave, to better understand best practice.

Delivery across the portfolio is impacted by:

- The need to fill vacancies that support our data and digital agenda, to help progress the full range of planned work in this area. The Department is working to address this, and it is starting to improve.
- High rates of agency use within the social work workforce continue to generate cost pressures for local authorities and can have a negative impact on consistent relationships with children and families. To help mitigate this, we are expecting to bring in new rules around agency use in the summer, following the 2023 consultation on the policy and the 2024 consultation on the statutory guidance.

Members welcomed the progress made since the previous meeting in January. On the challenges around securing data/digital expertise, they encouraged the Department to look at the expertise that exists within local authorities and commercial suppliers, to help inform how best to attract more talent. They urged the Department to ensure we keep up with fast-paced technological changes, including the increasing use of artificial intelligence.

Members also suggested the Department should go further in how it engages with parents and birth parents, as these represent one of the biggest groups of stakeholders within the children's social care system. As a result, commitment was made to explore systematic engagement with parents and birth parents.

The Board stressed the importance of ensuring good join-up across delivery partners to drive system-wide reform. There has been good engagement with the police and schools, and we need to continue to develop our ways of working with colleagues in NHS England.

### **Item 3: Local authority / partner engagement with reform programmes & embedding practice in the sector**

The Board held a discussion to reflect on how the Department engages with local authorities and other delivery partners, and how we can best use this engagement to embed practice change.

The Board considered three key questions: 1) What are the best ways for the Department and the sector, including pathfinder areas, to share learning? 2) Given the pressures facing the sector, what are effective solutions that members can share to support local authorities in embedding new practice? 3) How should the Department be working with strong leaders to support others in the sector to influence and drive reform delivery?

Members reflected on the need to craft a cohesive narrative that captures the overall story of what the reform agenda is seeking to achieve, as we too often talk about individual 'pockets' of reform. It was suggested that we should look at using case studies to help communicate this story.

The Board recognised that Ofsted has a key role to play in helping communicate a cohesive message, given their work with all local authorities. Ofsted have recently updated the language in their ILACS framework to reflect the publication of the Childrens Social Care National Framework and revised Working Together to Safeguard Children.

Members emphasised that the sector is well placed to bring people together in natural coalitions. High-performing local authorities with good practice should be encouraged to share learning with other local authorities and to help them improve their services. Peer-to-peer support is an effective route through to people learning and adopting new practice.

Members also noted that we must not lose sight of the human element and the impact these practices have on children and families. A good local authority is one that keeps its practice and policy changes close to those who are in receipt of those policies and services.

### **Item 4: AOB**

The Board was asked if there was any further business.

The Minister thanked members for their time and closed the meeting.